

Remarks to the Chamber of Commerce in Charlotte February 27, 2002

Thank you. Only in America. [*Laughter*] Frances, thanks. I appreciate your story; I appreciate your courage; and I appreciate your introduction. I'm also thankful that Tommy Thompson agreed to leave the State of Wisconsin to come and help make sure that Health and Human Services was run in the right spirit, in the right, compassionate attitude, one in which we fight for Federal funds that are reasonable and realistic but understand that the true wisdom and strength of the country is at the local level.

Speaking about the local level, I want to thank the mayor and Parks. Thank you very much for being here as well. I appreciate both you all's leadership. The innovation that takes place in this community is positive and strong, and that's why we're here, to herald a program that actually works. Sometimes they sound good on paper. They read good, but the results are short. And that's not the case in Mecklenburg County when it comes to putting people to work. So I want to thank you all for your leadership.

I had the privilege of flying down with Sue Myrick and Robin Hayes today on the airplane, two really good United States Congressmen from the State of North Carolina, people who understand that North Carolinians can best run North Carolina, and not people out of Washington, DC. So I want to thank you all for coming. And I want to thank Rodney Carroll, as well, for being here. I want to thank Carroll Gray and members of the chamber.

A lot of times I talk about responsibility, ushering in a period of responsible behavior in America. There is such thing as corporate responsibility, corporate America not only making sure the balance sheets are real, that all assets and liabilities are exposed for shareholder and employee alike. But there's something about saying, "I'm

going to do something in the community in which I live," working hard to take the extra step to employ somebody, to keep them on, to help them work through their difficulties. This is a community in which corporate North Carolina or corporate Charlotte has heard that call, and I want to thank the chamber for being on the leading edge of encouraging corporate responsibility.

First, let me tell you that, as I said a while ago, the state of this Union is very strong. It is clear to me, when I sat in the room today, that the state of the State of North Carolina is strong and vibrant, at least in this corner of the State, if not the whole State. But the state of our Union is strong. We are steady; we're resolved; and we are a determined nation.

You know, the enemy attacked a nation that they thought was weak, and man, did they make a mistake. They thought the United States was so materialistic, so caught up in a false Hollywood vision of America, that we would accept their attack as part of the normalcy in America, that we would do nothing about it. And they've now learned that this Nation is absolutely resolved to defend that which we hold dearest to our heart, and that's freedom—that when somebody attacks freedom, that we'll defend it with all our force and all our might. And that's what we're doing.

I think the country has laid out a clear message: First, that either you're with us, or you're against us in the fight for freedom; that either you stand beside this great Nation as part of a coalition that will defend freedom and defend civilization itself, or you're against us.

I think the message has gotten out. The world is knitted up pretty tight when it comes to bringing the Al Qaida and other killers to justice. We've had over 1,000 arrests around the world, different countries,

different governments that are putting these Al Qaida people behind bars. We're slowly but surely, methodically and patiently demolishing Al Qaida so they cannot hit us again.

We have made it clear that if you harbor a terrorist, if you feed a terrorist, if you train a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist. And the Taliban Government in Afghanistan found out exactly what I meant, thanks to a strong and spirited, well-motivated, well-trained United States military, a military of which I am immensely proud.

We have liberated a country. This great Nation seeks not revenge but justice, and at the same time, we're not conquerors, but we're liberators. We have liberated women and children from the clutches of one of the most barbaric regimes history has ever known.

It was my honor to welcome Mr. Karzai and his Cabinet, including a woman minister, to Washington, DC, and hear him firsthand say how anxious he is to restore Afghanistan to normalcy, where women and children, young girls are educated, just like young boys, where people are given a chance in life.

The Taliban made a terrible mistake, and they paid a dear price. And I'm grateful for the United States military for the job it's done, but more importantly, so are the average citizens of Afghanistan.

I want to tell my fellow Americans that we're still in a dangerous period when it comes to the first theater in the war against terror—dangerous because, until we complete our mission, which is to bring all Al Qaida killers to justice, that we're going to hunt them down, that we will stay on task. The good news for our United States military is that the American people are very patient, and they're resolved, just like our military is resolved.

But we're now facing people who send young kids to suicide—on suicide missions, and they, themselves, try to hide in caves; a leadership which is willing to send some

mom's child on a fruitless mission in the name of religion, and they, themselves, are doing everything they can to hide and not be accountable for what they've done.

But they can't hide long enough. There's no cave deep enough for them to avoid the long arm of justice of the United States. And so it doesn't matter how long it takes, as far as I'm concerned. It doesn't matter if it's a month, a year; Al Qaida, the people who killed thousands of United States citizens, the thugs who want to challenge freedom wherever it exists, those who use religion in the name of murder, will be brought to justice.

But it's not just Al Qaida. The mission is more than just one group or one individual. History has called us into action. History has given this Nation a chance to lead a coalition to fight terror wherever it exists.

There is a nightmare scenario that we must not let happen. Imagine, for example, if a faceless terrorist organization was able to team up with a nation which sponsored and developed weapons of mass destruction. Imagine how the balance of power in the world would change.

We're not going to let that happen. The United States of America cannot let nations that are not transparent, closed societies, societies which harm their citizens, societies which have a past history of being not a civilized nation, to develop a weapon of mass destruction, that could possibly team up with somebody like the Al Qaida organization, which would, therefore, then hold us hostage, hold the coalition hostage. We owe it to our children and our children's children to rid the world of terror now, so they can grow up in a free society, a society without fear, a society without the threat of attack on our own homeland.

The best homeland defense policy is to find out terrorists where they live, where they hide, and bring them to justice. And that's what I'm going to do, so long as I am the President of the United States.

I picked a good man to lead the homeland security effort. Tom Ridge was the Governor of Pennsylvania.

The last time I was here in the State of North Carolina, I talked about a first-responders initiative, about how the budget I was going to submit to Congress not only was going to make national defense a priority but also that homeland defense would be a priority. I have since done that. We talked about first-responders to make sure that the police and fire had a strategy necessary to respond to emergencies if it were to occur. I'm also talking about a bioterrorism initiative. I'm also talking about a border security initiative.

One of the interesting things I think that the people of North Carolina will appreciate, that I hold in high esteem the United States Coast Guard. We've got a plan to beef up the Coast Guard, to modernize her ships, to make sure the Coast Guard is available around all the coasts of the country to protect the homeland. We've got a better intelligence-sharing system in place. We've got a strategy to defend the homeland of the United States.

And every day I ask the question to the FBI Director and others, "What have you done to make the homeland more secure?" My fellow citizens need to know we're doing everything in our power to protect innocent families.

There's a lot to be done in Washington as well. Obviously, we've got to fight a recession. My view about the recession is that we'll help people with unemployment checks, and we must. But as Congress tries to figure out ways of how to deal with this, I always want them to remember that people want more than an unemployment check; they want a paycheck. And therefore, we ought to have jobs as a central aspect of any economic recovery plan—how best to create jobs.

What should we do? Well, I thought I did something pretty wise, and that was last year, when we got a sniff that the economy was pretty darn slow, was to fight for

a tax relief package that gave people their own money to spend. When people have more money in their pocket to spend, it creates more demand, which means somebody is producing products, which means somebody is getting a job. The more money people have in their pockets to spend in the face of recession, the more likely our economy is going to come out of a recession. And for those in Washington who think they want to roll back the tax relief, they're not going to get to do so. The tax relief was right. And it's important for the American people that we defend tax relief.

But there is more to do. I would hope Congress would pass an economic stimulus package that will encourage investment in plants and equipment. The more investment in plants and equipment, the more likely it is a textile worker is going to find a job. The more incentive there is for somebody to put a new piece of equipment in a factory, the more likely it is somebody is going to work. And so as they debate the stimulus package, it's important not only to remember we want to take care of those who have been affected by the attacks on 9/11, we also want to stimulate jobs, to encourage jobs.

We also—I submitted in my budget a priority for educating the American people, educating our kids. We talked today about the best welfare plan—best to make sure we keep people off welfare, besides helping them find work—is to make sure they're educated. And the State of North Carolina deserves congratulations for having a really good public school system. You were tied with Texas, and that's a big admission for a Texan to say. *[Laughter]*

I want you to know that we passed a good piece of education reform, and it ties in directly to what we're talking about today. It says, every child matters. We've got to challenge a system that tends to just shuffle children through without regard to whether they can read or write and add and subtract. We need to focus resources on Title I. We'll demand accountability.

We'll pass flexibility out of Washington, DC, to the local level. We've got a reading program that understands reading is the new civil right; if you can't read, you can't succeed in the America of the 21st century. This is a great piece of legislation, sponsored by both Republicans and Democrats. It shows what can happen when we put our Nation ahead of political party, which we must do more of in Washington, DC, as far as I'm concerned.

In order to make sure our economy recovers, in order to make sure we've got a balance sheet that is reasonable as we go into the out-years, I want to insist Congress hold the line in spending, that they not get carried away, that they not spend—that what they think sounds like—sounds good is not going to work.

One area in which I'm going to hold the line on the budget, though, is on TANF funds. My budget calls for over \$17 billion a year for TANF funds to be block-granted back to States. Now, there's going to be some in Congress that say we've got to reduce the TANF monies, welfare monies, because the caseloads have dropped. I don't think we ought to do that at this time in history. And so the budget I've submitted holds the line on TANF.

On the other hand, I do think we need some reforms, and I want to share with you some of those. But first, let me tell you that there has been great success when it came to welfare reform. We've actually changed the whole culture from dependency to self-sufficiency. And by doing that, the welfare rolls have declined dramatically, and the country's better off for it, but more importantly, so are the human beings.

It's so easy to get caught up in statistics, and forget about behind each number is a person. And today I have the honor of talking about—of hearing from the people involved, the human stories, the real-life stories of people that have overcome incredible obstacles.

I like to tell people, the toughest job in America is a single mom trying to raise

her children. That's the hardest hill to climb in this country. And yet, as a result of a collaborative effort of public-private partnership here in Mecklenburg County, a place where government and business teamed up, many people have been moved from dependency upon government to work.

Now, the system worked, but in order for that to happen, it requires a will, a personal determination. Some person has to say, "I can do better and want to do better," just like my introducer, Frances Cunningham, did. She is a single mom with two teenagers. That, in itself, deserves a medal. *[Laughter]* She has started working with the Work First Program, obviously has a job. But I want to quote what she said: "The success of it is, my children see me go to work every day. And that makes them go to school every day, because they see Mama isn't staying at home." The ability for somebody to realize kind of an independent life, less dependent upon government, not only affects that person but also affects a lot of other people, starting with the children—starting with the children.

I met with Michelle Venegas. Michelle is articulate. I told her she speaks better English than I do—*[laughter]*—although she got hired as a translator. She's from Mexico, Tijuana, Mexico. She was working for a company that went out of business. She needed a little transition help. She found it here in Mecklenburg County. By the way, she herself is a mom, got a little *ninita*. She went to the county department of social services. She found out they needed someone with Spanish language skills. She's now employed full-time by the department.

Kathleen Collado, I met with her as well. She's a single mom, recently divorced. She had no high school diploma. Imagine how tough her future looked. She needed to take a step up in life, and she found help. Kathleen was able to get her GED. She polished her interviewing skills and now works for U.S. Airways.

These are stories that are real. But the good news is, in this county and all across America, they have happened time and time again. There are 20,000 businesses nationwide that have helped 1.1 million people go from welfare to work. It is an essential ingredient of what the future bill ought to look like.

We need to make sure that work is an integral part of any welfare reauthorization, that the cornerstone of a good bill understands that when we help somebody find work—and I emphasize the “help somebody find work”—that leads to more independence, more self-esteem, and more joy and hope. And so, as Congress begins to reauthorize, I want to make sure that work is an integral component and a strong component. As a matter of fact, I believe that within 5 years, 70 percent of the welfare recipients must work. As part of the requirement, 70 percent of people being helped have got to get to work, and we’ll help.

The bill must allow for there to be adequate time for training. Of a 5-day work week, 3 could be devoted to work and 2 to education and job training. For the tougher cases, there ought to be time set aside exclusively for job training or drug rehabilitation. And high school moms ought to be allowed to get credit for going to high school at the same time as part of their work requirement. In other words, the system ought to insist upon work but encourage work by making sure people have got the skills necessary to work or the help necessary to make them a responsible person in the workplace.

Secondly, our public policy must encourage families. Research shows that two-parent families are more likely to raise a child that is going to go to high school or college, that a child in a two-parent family is less likely to get addicted to drugs. Now, I understand there are some families that just simply aren’t meant to be. I know that. I’m not—I’m wise about that. On the other hand, we ought to aim for a goal, a goal

that recognizes the power and importance of two-parent families in America.

And therefore, the budget I’m submitting and the reform that I hope that Congress will insist upon recognizes that premarital counseling can work, conflict resolution after marriage is important, antigambling—help the old man get off the gambling habit—will help. Drug and alcohol rehabilitation can be part of an important concept about keeping families together. We’ve got \$300 million—up to 300 million in the budget to encourage parenting and family programs to flourish at the local level.

And as well, I’ve got \$135 million in the budget for abstinence education programs. Now, let me be as candid as I can about this. Abstinence works every time—[laughter]—when it comes to making sure somebody may not have an unwanted child or someone picks up sexually transmitted disease. And this society ought to give children the benefit of the doubt. We ought not to assume that our culture is automatically going to lead a child to defy an abstinence education program. We ought to try it. We ought to work hard. We ought to shoot for the ideal in society and not get drug down by the cynics. And so part of making sure that welfare reauthorization is going to achieve objectives is to promote family and to encourage right choices amongst American youth.

Thirdly, we must trust local officials to manage the money necessary to achieve certain objectives and goals. We have got to have flexibility at the Federal level. Tommy understands that. It’s one of the main reasons I asked him to become the Secretary of Health and Human Services. He was a Governor; I was a Governor. We understand that the more flexibility there is at the local level, the more possible it is to meet local needs and, therefore, meet local and national objectives, to meet goals.

And so one of the things we’re going to ask Congress is not to micromanage the

system. There are hundreds of Federal welfare programs. For those of you who work in this line of work, you know what I'm talking about—hundreds of them, many of them with incredible hoops that need to be jumped through in order to be able to access funds. It is not necessary to have hundreds of welfare programs. What's necessary is to make a commitment to set goals, to expect results, and to trust local people in managing the dollars. And that's the spirit of welfare reform.

And we're going to push hard for this initiative in the United States Congress. I can't guarantee 100-percent success. But I can guarantee you, we're going to give it our best shot to make sure that we're able to achieve local objectives and, therefore, realize a national goal, and that is moving as many people as we can, as compassionately as we can, from welfare to work, helping people help themselves.

And finally, any part of a welfare authorization must understand the power of faith-based organizations and charitable organizations in our society. I have asked for legislation that will encourage charitable giving and, at the same time, allow faith-based organizations to access Federal dollars without discrimination, without causing the faith-based organization to abandon faith. You see, here's what I believe: I believe there are neighborhood healers and helpers all across America who want to love their neighbor just like they love themselves and ought to be encouraged rather than thwarted.

I know you've got a strong faith-based initiative here in Mecklenburg County. I want to applaud you for that. It makes sense to say to church and synagogue and mosque that if you want to help a neighbor in need, we encourage you to do so. It makes sense to recognize that sometimes a drug addict or an alcohol—person hooked on alcohol needs a change of heart in order to change behavior. And that doesn't happen through Government bureaucracies. It

happens as a result of people of faith interfacing with neighbors in need.

And so I'm calling on Congress, the Senate—and I talked to Senator Daschle about this this morning, and he wrote a very positive editorial about the need for faith-based programs in our society. I hope they get this legislation passed and to my desk. It is essential that we rally the armies of compassion all across the country.

Yesterday in Washington, DC, I met with a guy hooked on crack cocaine. He found the Lord. He changed his life. He's married. He was a lousy dad; he's now a good dad, upholding his obligations. He feels so much better about himself. And as importantly, he's a part of a program that exists in inner-city Washington, DC, trying to find the next crack cocaine addict, to help that person help themselves.

The fabric—I envision a fabric in our Nation of healers and helpers and faith-based, compassionate people, all reaching out to a neighbor in need. People ask me all the time, "What can I do in the fight against terror?" And the answer is: Do something good.

You see, it's the gathering—what I like to call the gathering momentum of millions of acts of kindness on a daily basis that stands strong against the evil which attacked our country. It is the ability for our Nation to show its compassionate side through acts and deeds of kindness and the willingness of somebody to put their arm around a child as a mentor and say, "I love you." Or just walking into a neighbor's house, an elderly neighbor's house, a shut-in, and saying, "I care about you. What can I do to help you today?"

This is the strength of the country. This is—we're not trying to reinvent something. We're tapping into the great soul of America. The spirit of our country is one based upon neighborhoods, people helping each other, communities all bound up with one thing in mind, how to make people's lives better.

You know, they hit us; they attacked us; they took life. But they have not been able to dent the spirit of America. We are strong. We are compassionate. We're a loving nation. And as a result, I see a future that is so hopeful and so bright for every citizen who's fortunate enough to call themselves an American.

Thank you for letting me come. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:25 a.m. at the Chamber of Commerce. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Patrick McCrory of

Charlotte; Parks Helms, chairman, Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners; Rodney Carroll, president and chief executive officer, Welfare to Work Partnership; Carroll Gray, president, Charlotte Chamber of Commerce; and Chairman Hamid Karzai of the Afghan Interim Authority. The President also referred to Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (Public Law No. 103-382), which amended Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Public Law No. 89-10), and TANF, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.

Remarks at a Fundraiser for Senatorial Candidate Elizabeth Dole and Congressional Candidate Robin Hayes in Charlotte *February 27, 2002*

Thank you all very much. Please, be seated. Your salad might get cold. [*Laughter*] Thanks so much for that warm welcome.

It's great to be back in the State of North Carolina. It just seems like I was here a couple of weeks ago—I was. [*Laughter*] I love coming to your State. The people here are wonderful and friendly. I love working the rope line at the airport when people say, "Mr. President, I'm praying for you." I can't tell you how wonderful that makes me feel.

I thank you for your support and your friendship. I thank you for getting ready to send a fabulous woman to the United States Senate named Elizabeth Dole. I appreciate all those who have come to contribute not only to Elizabeth but to my friend Robin Hayes's campaign, but also to the Republican Party of North Carolina.

Somebody said to me the other day—or, actually, asked me today, you know, am I going to campaign? "Here we are in war. Do you think it's all right for the President to go campaign?" I said, "Yes, I do. I think it'd be a lot easier for me to accomplish what I want to accomplish with Denny

Hastert as Speaker of the House of Representatives and with Trent Lott as majority leader of the United States Senate."

So I want to thank you all for coming to support two good candidates in the party. I also want to say, although Elizabeth is going to make a great United States Senator, it's been a joy to work with Jesse Helms. He's been a strong voice. And like—you know, Robin is smart enough to send his wife. [*Laughter*] I should have sent mine. [*Laughter*] What a fabulous job she's doing.

You know, when I married her, she was a public school librarian, didn't particularly care for politics—truth be known, politicians. [*Laughter*] And now she has been in a position of such important responsibility, and she's handled her position with such calm and resolve. She's been a wonderful comforter, not only to me but to the country, and I'm so grateful for her and the sacrifices she has made.

We're doing great, by the way. I've never felt stronger in my life. I think it's because my wife is so great. It's also because I happen to be the President of the greatest